

# *“He Hath Made with [Us] an Everlasting Covenant, Ordered in All Things, and Sure”*

STEPHEN M. JONES

**B**rothers and sisters, I am humbled at the opportunity to be with you today. I express thanks for the music we have heard and hope my words will complement the spirit of worship it has brought to this setting.

Ever since I was a young man, music has played a central role in my life. As a composer I have spent countless hours in front of blank manuscript paper attempting to arrange collections of notes into musical expressions. Finding the right sequences of notes and chords does not come easily for me, as a quick glance through my sketchbooks will reveal. Lines, arrows, and numbers show how one chord is connected with another in order to create a phrase that projects the music forward, resulting in a sense of progression and, eventually, arrival. Many possibilities are explored until the music feels not only acceptable but also correct and complete. In the end, the music is right because the notes and rhythms are in the right order.

It is of order I wish to speak today. Order is “a state in which everything is in its correct or appropriate place” and “in which the laws and rules regulating . . . behavior . . . are observed and authority is obeyed.”<sup>1</sup> It can be seen in mathematical logic, games, grammatical structures, and architectural forms—to name only a few examples. It is evident in the fixed courses

of “the earth and all the planets,” said the Lord, and in the law given “unto all things, by which they move in their times and their seasons.”<sup>2</sup> As order is evident in the creation of all things the Lord has made and in all He does, seeking greater order in our lives will help us understand His divine nature and become more like Him.

Poets, playwrights, and prophets have all commented on the nature of order. The great English poet Alexander Pope wrote, “Order is Heav’n’s first law.”<sup>3</sup> In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare’s character Maria tells Sir Toby, “You must confine yourself within the modest limits of order.”<sup>4</sup> Paul counseled the Corinthians, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is King Benjamin’s address that best teaches us about the relationship between order and balance:

*And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.*<sup>6</sup>

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Having this kind of balance and order in our own lives is a requirement for effective service in our homes and in public service and Church callings. For example, the Lord has plainly tutored priesthood holders about the relationship between order in their personal lives and power in the priesthood. “Amen,” said the Lord, “to the priesthood or the authority of that man”<sup>7</sup> whose life and proclamations are not backed by actions aligned with righteous principles. All of us, not only priesthood holders, must carefully guard against situations in which our behavior is not aligned with our beliefs; for where hypocrisy is present, its negative power becomes greater than that of any position or any righteous intent on our part. Thus, in 1833, the Lord counseled the newly organized First Presidency of the Church to “set in order” both their own houses as well as “to preside in council, and set in order all the affairs of this church and kingdom.”<sup>8</sup> Not two months later the entire First Presidency, along with Bishop Newel K. Whitney, were again given firm reminders to set in order their families.<sup>9</sup> The counsel the Lord gave them to be “more diligent and concerned at home”<sup>10</sup> teaches us volumes about the consistency we need in ordering and regulating all of the dimensions of our lives.

### **Order, Offerings, and Priesthood Ordinances**

Another important dimension of order in the priesthood is seen in the Old Testament, in which many of the references to the word *order* are directly related to temple and sacrificial offerings. In Exodus 40 we read about the rearing of the tabernacle. Here the Lord gave detailed instructions about the ark of the covenant, the altars, and the table on which Moses is to “set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it,” including the bread. Aaron is then to bring his sons and prepare them to “minister unto me in the priest’s office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.”<sup>11</sup>

Again relating to order and offerings, the Lord instructed Joseph Smith in this dispensation:

*Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.*

*Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name?*

*Or will I receive . . . that which I have not appointed?*

*And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?*<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, from before time we were taught of the order in the priesthood and its ordinances, and this knowledge can bless us now as we work to make acceptable our offerings to the Lord.

That the principle of order is linked with the priesthood is not surprising, given that the true name of the Melchizedek Priesthood is “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, all order flows from God’s authority established in the greater priesthood and its ordinances, by which “the power of godliness is manifest”<sup>14</sup> unto us.

Elder Boyd K. Packer has defined the relationship between order, ordain, and ordinance as follows:

*“Order—To put in ranks or rows, in proper sequence or relationship.*

*Ordain—The process of putting things in rows of proper relationship.*

*Ordinance—The ceremony by which things are put in proper order.”*<sup>15</sup>

Regular participation in saving priesthood ordinances helps us order our lives. Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote that “ordinances are intended to cast our minds forward to specific promises and to our developmental possibilities.”<sup>16</sup>

Alma confirmed this when he stated:

*These ordinances were given . . . that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.*<sup>17</sup>

Ordinances point us to Christ and to His saving power. As an example, think of the order that arises from something as short as the sacrament prayer. In remarkable yet dignified simplicity, this single-sentence ordinance affects the lives of millions of Latter-day Saints across the world each week. Acting in concert with our baptismal covenant, it calls upon our wills, asking that we take upon us the name of Christ. It calls upon our minds, asking us to always remember Him. It calls upon our hearts, asking us to keep His commandments.<sup>18</sup> And it calls upon our strength, asking us to renew this covenant “often”<sup>19</sup> and to be obedient until the end of our lives.<sup>20</sup> In return, we are promised the constant and guiding presence of a member of the Godhead in our personal lives who witnesses of the Father and the Son and directs us down the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life.”<sup>21</sup>

What mercy and power there is in this exchange of promises between God and us! And the depth of the promises only becomes greater as we progress along the path of ordinances and covenants. These sacred ceremonies bind us to God and to each other with the promise that all of the blessings He possesses will be ours to share with our families across generations through our obedience and faithfulness.<sup>22</sup>

These great promises awaken a fixed desire in our hearts to order and align our lives with God. Participation in the ordinances is not merely a transaction or tutorial; when approached worthily, it is in reality a direct and personal interaction with God through the authority of His appointed servants. Thus, as Elder Robert D. Hales noted, they have a trans-

forming effect on our sense of loyalty: “When we understand our baptismal covenant and the gift of the Holy Ghost, it will change our lives and will establish our *total allegiance* to the kingdom of God.”<sup>23</sup>

Ordinances and covenants act as a compass to the soul, guiding and correcting our present course and helping us navigate toward future possibilities. Elder Packer has compared them to

*a sextant in our minds infinitely more refined and precise than that of any mariner. It functions on the principle of light from celestial sources. . . . If we will set that sextant in our minds to the words ordinance and covenant, and then look up, light will come through. Then you will know how to fix your position and plot your course.*<sup>24</sup>

Fixing our position on ordinances and covenants is the only sure way we can achieve exaltation, because they define the requirements upon which our promises rest.<sup>25</sup> Again, quoting Elder Packer, “Ordinances and covenants become our credentials for admission into His presence. To worthily receive them is the quest of a lifetime; to keep them thereafter is the challenge of mortality.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Discerning Order**

Thankfully, through the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we are able to tell when our lives are not in alignment with our covenants. As my favorite *Star Wars* character, Yoda, might say, “Notice we do, when out of order things are.” Yoda’s syntax is understandable but never correct—at least not on this planet! Unlike your performance in English class, apparently, Yoda’s mastery of the Force and his leadership of the Jedi are not dependent upon good grammar. The grammar and syntax of our lives, however, must become correctly ordered, for our words and works are entered into the book of life, out of which we will be judged.<sup>27</sup>

Being ready for that final exam requires exercising judgment and creating order in our lives each and every day. Moroni taught, “It is given unto [us] to judge, that [we] may know good from evil; and the way to judge is . . . plain.” He assured us that we can know of these things “with a perfect knowledge,” being able to judge good from evil “as the daylight is from the dark night.”<sup>28</sup>

Alma taught us that spiritual knowledge is “real . . . because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible.”<sup>29</sup> Truth always brings clarity. Conversely, actions or ideas that cause “a stupor of thought”<sup>30</sup> or lack confirmation and clarity are incorrect and take us down paths we should not go.

Disorder is not a condition we should leave unattended when we can exercise our agency to correct it. It leads to dysfunction and, eventually, to spiritual death. Satan and his forces of destruction are doing all they can to disrupt the order of families, communities, nations, political and educational institutions, and the minds of men and women throughout the world. We must guard in every way against the pernicious threats he makes to stable and happy lives and to truth itself. The ultimate disorder he seeks to perpetuate is to have us confuse good and evil—a work he began in the Garden of Eden and continues today.<sup>31</sup>

Brothers and sisters, in God’s house there is no confusion about right and wrong! There is no dysfunction or disruption. There is order, which is life affirming and light giving. Order leads us, and by cultivating it we reap attendant virtues that are powerful in helping us keep covenants—including restraint, judgment, discipline, and submission.

### **Fostering Order in Our Lives**

How can we increase order in our lives? As mentioned earlier, we can obey. Firm obedience<sup>32</sup> keeps our minds clear and strong, our thoughts and spirits clean. We are then entitled to know and do the will of the Lord.

We can ask the right questions of the Lord and listen carefully to His answers. As we come to hear His voice speak to our minds, we learn that He is an instructor who is focused, purposeful, undeviating, clear in His communication, and powerful in His ability to direct. These experiences in prayer tune our thoughts and actions so that they will be in harmony with His will.

We can study the word of the Lord, which will “divide asunder all the cunning and the snares . . . of the devil, and lead [us] in a strait and narrow course . . . and land [our] immortal souls . . . in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>33</sup>

We can exercise patience, knowing that ultimate order will come only after we “have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it.”<sup>34</sup> In the words of one of today’s hymns, “Leave to thy God to order and provide; / In ev’ry change he faithful will remain.”<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, we can seek intelligence and make our eye single to the glory of God. We know intelligence is light and truth.<sup>36</sup> Light casts out darkness, and we eventually are left with the blazing clarity of truth, seeing things exactly as they are and will be.<sup>37</sup> This knowledge, unadorned in its pure and holy nature, will literally order our souls, causing us to become sanctified and comprehend all things.<sup>38</sup>

### **Order, Covenants, and Brigham Young University**

Effective learning and teaching at BYU—indeed, all that we do here—is dependent upon the strength of order and the promises associated with our covenants. The process of learning involves ordering and sequencing information; separating, examining, and testing ideas; and then adding them together so they become whole in our minds and in our hearts.

The Lord told the Kirtland Saints: “Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a

house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God."<sup>39</sup>

At BYU we act under the charge to be a unique university, to build a house of learning not only through study but also through the exercise of lively faith. Why? So that we, in the words of Joseph's prayer of dedication of the Kirtland Temple, "may be found worthy . . . to secure a fulfilment of the promises . . . made unto us . . . in the revelations."<sup>40</sup> Those revelations promise "a time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld," in which the Almighty will pour "down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints."<sup>41</sup>

That sounds to me like a promise any university would revel in! Realizing those blessings will require us to keep our covenants. Robert Millet, former dean of Religious Education, wrote:

*Brigham Young University must become a covenant community if we are to enjoy those divine powers that are channeled through covenant. Covenants provide direction. Covenants establish parameters and limits. Covenants bestow and extend vision.*<sup>42</sup>

Those parameters and limits include our special Honor Code, to which I believe we can and should give greater attention. Kim Clark, president of BYU—Idaho, recently counseled students there on this important topic, from which I quote one sentence that is a key for us individually and as a community: "Obedience to the *small* things creates a spirit of obedience in *all* things."<sup>43</sup>

That this BYU community would establish and achieve its prophetic vision is something for which many of us hope and pray and for which all of us are responsible. President Kimball reminded us:

*We must do more than pray for these outcomes at BYU, though we must surely pray. We must take*

*thought. We must make effort. We must be patient. We must be professional. We must be spiritual. Then, in the process of time, this will become the fully anointed university of the Lord about which so much has been spoken in the past.*<sup>44</sup>

I believe "fully anointed" to be the description of a Zion university, a united order of learning.

### **Order Through the Atonement**

In our attempts to order our lives, we will undoubtedly fall short. Any of my closest associates and family members know I fail to order all within my stewardship. How thankful we are for forgiving friends and for time to improve—both made possible through the perfect Atonement, which provides us the transforming power sufficient to order and align us completely with the light and truth that is in our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is the agent of the Atonement that enables us the opportunity and possibility to finally order and undeviatingly regulate our souls. Until that day of fullness comes, it is the Atonement that makes up the difference between our inabilities and our responsibilities.

As commanded by the Lord, Abraham took Isaac, his only son, "to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood."<sup>45</sup> In fulfillment of this "shadow of good things to come,"<sup>46</sup> Christ's offering for us was made by One whose life was in perfect order, which He faithfully reported to the Father:

*I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. . . . And now come I to thee.*<sup>47</sup>

Mercifully, brothers and sisters, He does not want to come alone: "Father," prayed Jesus,

“I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.”<sup>48</sup>

Surely, returning to our loving Father is the final purpose of our attempts to order our lives, that in full and complete wholeness, sanctified through the blood of the Lamb, we might “dwell in the presence of God and his Christ”<sup>49</sup> and belong to the order of those who have overcome, “they into whose hands the Father has given all things.”<sup>50</sup>

Joseph Smith taught, “This is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment: he must have been instructed in the government and laws of that kingdom by proper degrees.”<sup>51</sup> Thankfully, the Lord of order will lead us “line upon line, precept upon precept,” consoling us and “confirming our hope” along the way.<sup>52</sup>

Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Never has anyone offered so much to so many in so few words as when Jesus said, ‘Here am I, send me’ (Abr. 3:27).”<sup>53</sup> He has kept His covenant with us. Let us now, like Abraham, lay the wood in order on the altar and be found “willing to observe [our] covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which . . . the Lord shall command.”<sup>54</sup> We will then be accepted of Him, and from our sincere yet incomplete efforts His mercy will flow to us until we become wells “of living water, springing up unto everlasting life.”<sup>55</sup>

I bear witness of God, our Father, and of His Son, Jesus Christ, in whom “he hath made with [us] an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.”<sup>56</sup> I express thanks for the special place in His restored kingdom this great university occupies. May we order our lives through the divine pattern of ordinances and covenants, I pray in His holy name, even Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. *Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English*, 2006, s.v. “order.”
2. D&C 88:43 and 42; see also D&C 88:44–47.

3. Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* (1734), Epistle IV, line 49.

4. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth-Night*, act 1, scene 3, line 8.

5. 1 Corinthians 14:40.

6. Mosiah 4:27.

7. D&C 121:37; see also D&C 121:34–36.

8. D&C 90:15–16; see also D&C 90:17–18.

9. See D&C 93:40–50.

10. D&C 93:50.

11. Exodus 40:4, 15; see also Exodus 40:1–15, 23.

12. D&C 132:8–11.

13. D&C 107:3.

14. D&C 84:20; see also D&C 84:19–21.

15. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 145.

16. Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 76.

17. Alma 13:16.

18. See D&C 20:77; John 14:15.

19. D&C 20:75.

20. See Mosiah 5:8; 2 Nephi 31:16.

21. 2 Nephi 31:18; see also 2 Nephi 31:17.

22. See D&C 76:59; 84:38.

23. Robert D. Hales, “The Covenant of Baptism: To Be in the Kingdom and of the Kingdom,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 7; emphasis added.

24. Boyd K. Packer, regional representatives’ seminar, 3 April 1987; quoted in Carlos E. Asay, “Stay on the True Course,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 61.

25. See D&C 82:10.

26. Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 24.

27. See Revelation 20:12.

28. Moroni 7:15.

29. Alma 32:35.

30. D&C 9:9.

31. See Isaiah 5:20; also Genesis 3:4–5.

32. See D&C 5:22.

33. Helaman 3:29–30.

34. 2 Nephi 9:18.

35. “Be Still, My Soul,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 124.

36. See D&C 93:36.
37. See Jacob 4:13.
38. See D&C 88:67.
39. D&C 88:119; emphasis added.
40. D&C 109:11.
41. D&C 121:28, 33.
42. Robert L. Millet (BYU Religious Education faculty lecture, 29 October 1992), *BYU as a Covenant Community: Implications for Excellence, Distinctiveness, and Academic Freedom* (Provo: BYU, 1992), 44.
43. Kim B. Clark, "Out of Small Things Proceedeth That Which Is Great," devotional delivered at Brigham Young University—Idaho, 10 January 2006; emphasis in original; see [http://www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2006\\_01\\_10\\_Clark.htm](http://www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2006_01_10_Clark.htm).
44. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University" (BYU Founders Day address, 10 October 1975), *Speeches of the Year, 1975* (Provo: BYU Press, 1976), 253.
45. Genesis 22:9.
46. Hebrews 10:1.
47. John 17:4, 13.
48. John 17:24.
49. D&C 76:62.
50. D&C 76:55; see also D&C 76:59–60.
51. *HC* 2:8.
52. D&C 128:21.
53. Neal A. Maxwell, "Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and King," *Ensign*, May 1976, 26.
54. D&C 97:8.
55. D&C 63:23.
56. 2 Samuel 23:5.